**I can problem solve**

**Introduction**

Every day, some kind of interpersonal problem arises between children, a child and a teacher, or a child and other authority figures. Some children can cope with and solve these kinds of problems very well; others appear less able to think them through. Over 20 years of research has shown that, as early as age 4, children can learn that behavior has causes, that people have feelings, and that there is more than one way to solve a problem. They can also decide whether and idea is or is not a good one.

This volume, along with two companion volumes designed for kindergarten-primary and intermediate elementary grades, shows teachers how to help children learn to solve the problems they have with others. The program outlined in this book was originally developed for 4 year old children in a pre school setting; the early language and feeling-word concepts can also be followed by most 3 year olds.

The approach employed, originally called Interpersonal Cognitive Problem Solving, has come to be called I Can Problem Solve (ICPS) by the many adults and children who have used it. Although children with serious emotional disturbances will likely require more individual attention and/or outside professional help, ICPS offers a practical approach to help most children learn to evaluate and deal with problems. It’s underlying goal is to help children learn *how* to think, not *what* to think. It does not tell them what to do when conflict or other problem situations come up. Rather, it gives children ways to talk about their view of problems and think problems through. The main goal, focus, content, method, and benefits of ICPS are summarized on the following page.

As this summary suggests, the benefits of ICPS training are numerous. Research has shown that when children learn to use problem solving thinking, their social adjustment improves, with significant reductions in nagging and demanding, emotional upset, and social withdrawal. Children become more able to wait, share, and take turns, as well as to get along with others. Regardless of temperament, children become better liked and more aware of – even genuinely concerned about – the feelings of others. In brief, children who have learned the ICPS concepts are more successful in getting what they want when they can have it and are better able to cope with frustration when they cannot. Finally ICPS not only helps lessen problem behaviors, but 1 and 2 year follow up studies suggest that it can actually prevent their occurrence.

Evidence that the program is having an impact becomes noticeable to the teacher as children begin to use the language of problem solving in the classroom. During the early weeks, most children will begin to adopt the initial verbal concept skills outside of formal training, although it is not until later in the program that children begin to solve interpersonal problems on their own.

Some inhibited children will begin to speak up after only 2 or 3 weeks of the program, and many start relating to others by the end of the first 2 months. Changes in impulsive behavior take somewhat longer to occur, but most children show signs of increased patience, reduced emotionality, and readiness to talk things over before the final lesson is conducted.

As they learn the ICPS skills and how to use them, impulsive youngsters become less aggressive, less emotional in the face of frustration, and less impatient. Inhibited youngsters become less withdrawn and better able to stand up for their rights. At program’s end, some youngsters may still act aggressively or impulsively, but they will have begun to talk about what they do in a way that indicates overt behavior change will soon follow. Although it takes time for such major behavior changes to occur, teachers find that helping children learn to think for themselves is well worth the effort.

**The ICPS program**

**GOAL** To teach children thinking skills that can be used to help resolve or prevent “people” problems

**FOCUS** Teaches children *how* to think, not *what* to think

Guides children to think for themselves

Teaches children how to evaluate their own ideas

Encourages children to come up with many solutions to problems on their own

**CONTENT** **Pre-Problem-Solving Skills**

Learning a problem-solving vocabulary

Identifying one’s own and others’ feelings

Considering other people’s points of view

Learning cause and effect

**Problem-Solving Skills**

Thinking of more than one solution

Considering consequences

Deciding which solution to choose

**METHOD** Teaches skills through the use of games, stories, puppets, and role-playing

Guides the use of skills in real-life situations

Integrates ideas into other cognitive skills

Includes parent participation

**BENEFITS For Children**

Fun for children – presents lessons in game form

Builds self-confidence

Builds listening skills

Encourages generation of alternative solutions

Provides skills to handle new problems

Facilitates social interaction among peers

Teaches skills applicable to other situations

Increases sensitivity to others, sharing, and caring

Increases independence

Increases ability to wait

Increases ability to cope with frustration

Decreases impulsivity

Decreases social withdrawal